

5. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said step of determining to deallocate said time slot from said channel is performed only if the level of priority associated with said time slot is lower than a highest level of priority.

6. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said step of determining to deallocate said time slot from said channel is further based upon an evaluation regarding to which channel a time slot was last allocated.

7. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said step of determining to deallocate said time slot from said channel is further based upon an evaluation regarding to which channel a time slot has been allocated the longest period of time.

8. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said step of determining to deallocate said time slot from said channel is further based upon an evaluation regarding from which channel a time slot was last deallocated.

9. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said step of determining to deallocate said time slot from said channel is further based upon an evaluation regarding from which channel a time slot should be deallocated in order to counteract time slot fragmentation on the bitstream of interest.

10. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said associating step comprises associating all time slots allocated to said channel with the same selected level of priority.

11. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said associating step comprises associating said channel with said selected level of priority, thereby associating each time slot allocated to said channel with the same selected level of priority.

12. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of claims 1-9], wherein said associating step comprises associating different time slots allocated to said channel with different levels of priority.

13. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of claims 1-9], wherein said associating step comprises associating time slots allocated to said channel over a first portion of said network with a selected level of priority and associating time slots [slots] allocated to said channel over another portion of said network with another selected level of priority.

14. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said associating step comprises changing the level of priority associated with a time slot allocated to said channel.

15. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], comprising the step of determining the priority by which said channel is to be re-established in case of channel failure based upon said selected level over priority.

16. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], comprising the step of determining a degree of redundancy requested for said channel based upon said selected level over priority.

17. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said associating step comprises selecting said selected level of priority based upon the identity of a physical or virtual port or interface to/from which traffic pertaining to said channel is delivered.

18. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said associating step comprises selecting said selected level of priority based upon an identification of the type of application that traffic to be transported in said channel pertains to.

19. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], wherein said associating step comprises selecting said selected level of priority based upon priority information derived from overlying network protocols.

20. (Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of the preceding claims], comprising transmitting information on said selected level of priority associated with said time slot to one more [more] other nodes of the network in order for said other nodes to be able to switch said channel taking said level of priority into consideration.

28. (Amended) An apparatus as claimed in claim 24 [any one of claims 24-27], wherein said apparatus manages time slot allocation/[-]deallocation on behalf of several nodes of said network.

29. (Amended) Use of a method as claimed in claim 1 [any one of claims 1-23, or an apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 24-28], for specifying different traffic service classes based upon said priority levels when operating a communication network.

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